



Public Hearing Testimony of
Sharon Palmer, Commissioner
Department of Labor
Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 10, 2014

Good Afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator McLachlan and Representative Hwang and members of the **Government Administration and Elections Committee**. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with written testimony regarding **House Bill No. 5431, AA Requiring the Suspension of Administrative Penalties Imposed on Certain Business Entities**. My name is Sharon Palmer and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Labor.

I oppose this proposed bill. The Department of Labor has the authority to assess civil penalties on employers that violate the wage and workplace standards laws. The ability to do this is vital in order to protect Connecticut's workers. Penalties can be assessed for a variety of reasons, including failure to pay wages and improperly employing minors, particularly in hazardous occupations. Requiring an employer that has failed to properly pay wages to its employees for the last two years, to pay back only the proper wages is not a deterrent to future violations. In addition, recent legislation increased the fine for child labor violations to \$600 due to the seriousness of abusing our young workers. It is important to send a message that if a company employs minors, it should know the law and follow it. Suspending a first time penalty, as the bill proposes, also does not take into consideration the seriousness of a violation. For those violations that are particularly egregious, suspension of the penalty would not be just. The Department currently has regulations that allow an employer to appeal certain penalty assessments. If the employer can prove there is no violation, the Department will remove the penalty. Finally, it makes more sense to assess a civil penalty to change behavior than to simply pursue criminal charges in every instance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today.

